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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

The Soviet Military Buildup Along the Chinese Border

CIA ONE SN-7-68

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25 March 1968

No. 7-68

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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 7-68

SUBJECT: The Soviet Military Buildup Along the Chinese Border*

SUMMARY

A. The past two and a half years have witnessed a significant quantitative as well as qualitative improvement of the Soviet military posture near China. There has been a steady increase in the strength of regular combat units along the Sino-Soviet border. For the first time in two decades, a significant Soviet combat force is taking shape in Mongolia. Certain units of the Strategic Rocket Forces have almost certainly been earmarked for potential missile strikes against Chinese targets.

the types of Soviet units involved in the reinforcement

* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research.

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indicate that the Soviets are preparing their forces not just for containing local outbreaks of fighting, but even for the eventual possibility of major military operations -- either conventional or nuclear -- against the Chinese.

B. The basic decisions behind this far-reaching shift in the Soviet military posture appear to have been made during the summer or early fall of 1965. The time factor suggests that these decisions were influenced primarily by the failure of efforts by the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime from October 1964 to about mid-1965 to moderate the Sino-Soviet dispute, and also by the evident continued progress of the Chinese nuclear and strategic weapons development program during the same period. In addition, the Cultural Revolution in China and all its attendant uncertainties must have reinforced the USSR's determination to press ahead with their own military contingency measures.

C. The Soviets probably have several goals in mind. At a minimum, they apparently wish to dissuade the Chinese from undertaking organized military actions against the USSR or Mongolia. Beyond this, the Soviets may believe it desirable to develop the capability for conducting limited military operations across the Chinese border. In any case, it appears that the Soviet military buildup near China will continue, for the near term at least, at roughly the pace set in late 1965, and Moscow is evidently beginning to ponder the long-term implications for the entire Soviet defense establishment.

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DISCUSSION

There is no longer any doubt now that behind the slogan proclaimed in Peking that "the wind is blowing from the East" is a concrete plan that apparently arose in the heads of Mao Tse-tung and his associates back in the 1950s and has of late been officially termed in China "The Great Strategic Plan of Mao Tse-tung"... In a number of respects the "Mao Plan" strikingly resembles the once notorious "Tanaka Plan" -- a plan devised by the Japanese military for the conquest of Asia by gradual stages. The Maoists' plans, and even more their actions, make it possible to say the following. Mao proposes to include in his Reich -- in addition to China itself -- Korea, the Mongolian People's Republic, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and several other countries in the area. In the second stage of 'the storm from the East' expansion is planned in the direction of the Indian subcontinent, Soviet Central Asia, the Soviet Far East and the Near East. What is anticipated on paper for the third stage is not yet entirely clear. But the plan is not restricted to the "Maoization" of Asia. "We shall gaze proudly upon five continents", one of Mao Tse-tung's myrmidons declares. "China's today is the whole world's tomorrow" ...

The Peking military autocracy is clearly dreaming of a new celestial empire, acting formally under the red flag of socialism but in fact copying the militarist policy of the Chinese emperors -- the conquerors and mandarins of long-forgotten centuries...

Literaturnaya Gazetta, Moscow,
27 September and 4 October 1967

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The Early Buildup

1. Rather than being a single, gradual process, the Soviet buildup of military forces near China has passed through two fairly distinct phases. The first phase, under Khrushchev, extended from about the beginning of 1962 through the fall of 1964. During that period the Soviets were primarily concerned with providing security against border incidents. The main military development involved the reorganization and redeployment of the 150,000 man KGB Border Guard force. The number of Border Guard Districts on the Chinese border was increased from 3 to 4, and some Border Guard detachments were apparently shifted to the border region. [redacted] by mid-1964 an undetermined number of Border Guards were assisting the Mongolians in patrols along the Sino-Mongolian border. By the fall of 1964, about half the total 150,000 man Border Guard force was estimated to be stationed near China.

2. By contrast to the Border Guard reshuffling, there was very little change from 1962-1964 in the status of the regular Soviet armed forces (i.e. those under the Defense

Ministry) in the area. For several years prior to 1962 the Soviets maintained 14 ground force divisions in areas within 300 miles of the Chinese and Mongolian borders, of which 11 were positioned near strategic and vulnerable railroad lines east of Lake Baykal, essentially as a railroad security force. In addition, the Soviets had available the Far East Long Range Air Army, the Pacific Fleet, and a number of medium range and intermediate range ballistic missile sites, plus air defenses; according to the consensus of the intelligence community at the time, however, the vast bulk of these forces was deployed against US power in the Pacific and US allies in Asia and the Middle East. To this portion located near China, the Soviets added a single motorized rifle regiment in 1963 and a low-strength motorized rifle division in 1964. Both units were in all likelihood intended principally to backstop the Border Guards.

3. Although the keynote of Soviet military preparations vis-a-vis the Chinese from 1962-1964 was border security, there are some indications that Soviet military officers themselves were beginning to ponder more serious contingencies.

[redacted]

Another indicator was a strongly anti-Peking article which appeared in the October 1963 issue of the restricted Ministry of Defense journal, Voyennaya Mysl' (Military Thought). The author described Peking's military and political strategy as "anti-Soviet", and claimed that the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party had "broken with Marxism-Leninism", was pursuing "great power aims", and was hoping to establish "the epoch of world domination by people of the yellow race".

4. The logic of the indicators cited above would have dictated a considerably greater Soviet military reinforcement than actually occurred during the period. Either the Ministry of Defense failed to argue the case before the political

leadership, or Khrushchev refused to be convinced by the arguments. Moreover, for about a year after the fall of Khrushchev, it seemed that military reinforcements were about to be terminated. No more than two Border Guard detachments, of 1000-2000 men each, were added from late 1964 to late 1965, and these additions were made probably as a result of decisions taken under Khrushchev.

it appears that Moscow was at least as anxious to prevent over-reactions to minor Chinese provocations as to receive timely information regarding the incidents themselves.

Re-Appraisal Under the New Soviet Leadership

5. This period of Soviet armed quiescence along the Chinese border coincided with the private efforts of the new Soviet regime both to moderate the Sino-Soviet dispute and to work out some type of coordinated strategy with Peking and Hanoi toward the Vietnam war. By approximately mid-1965 the Soviets

must have realized that their relations with the Chinese were likely to worsen. The Chinese had rebuffed Moscow's overtures for united action, and they had given evidence of pushing ahead with their nuclear weapons development program; the second Chinese nuclear device was detonated in May 1965. On 25 February, the New China News Agency had warned that there are groups "even here in China, who believe in Khrushchev revisionism", a statement which suggested the imminence of a purge and a more hostile attitude toward the USSR. A demonstration outside the Soviet Embassy in Peking in March 1965 must have increased Soviet apprehensions even more.

6. By 1965 the Soviets had become concerned about the potential Chinese threat to the underpopulated (1.1 million) buffer state of Mongolia. The Mongolian armed forces numbered no more than 40,000 men, including border guards. (In contrast to most Communist countries, Mongolia has no significant manpower reserve.) There were about 20,000 Chinese in Mongolia at the time, most of them men of combat age, plus numerous Mongolian opponents of the Tsedenbal (pro-Soviet) wing of the Mongolian Communist Party. Mongolia was thus vulnerable, not

just to a Chinese Communist invasion, but to a Peking inspired coup. Clearly, Moscow would have to help. The whole matter was probably discussed during Shelepin's visit to Mongolia in January 1965 and during Tsedenbal's visit to Moscow in April of the same year.

The Second Phase

7. The evidence indicates that during the late summer or early fall of 1965, the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership, doubtless after extensive consultation with the Soviet General Staff and the KGB, approved the initiation of major deployments of regular Soviet military units to the border area. In November 1965, an army corps headquarters was transferred from the Afghan to the Sinkiang border. This was qualitatively different from previous Soviet military moves; it presaged the creation of a multidivision force, with various combat support units. Such a level of forces would presumably acquire tactical nuclear weapons support within its organization. And in fact, two ground force divisions and a half dozen airfields have since been added to the corps' present area of responsibility. The

airfields facilitate supply of the existing Soviet forces, and allow for rapid reinforcement, if necessary.

8. Secondly, the Soviets decided, prior to the signing of the Soviet-Mongolian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in January 1966 (with Brezhnev and the Soviet Defense Minister present in Ulan Bator for the ceremonies), not only to upgrade the capabilities of the Mongolian forces, but also to station a sizeable contingent of ground forces and combat support units in Mongolia. This decision logically required a complementary augmentation of the rear area to the north and east of Mongolia -- the Transbaykal Military District. The accretion to the Transbaykal-Mongolia area has been both quantitative -- as many as six more divisions, plus tactical air and air defense support, six new graded earth airfields in Mongolia -- and qualitative; for example, Moscow placed the former 1st Deputy Commander of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany in command there.

9. Also the Soviets apparently decided that the training patterns of the Soviet divisions along the northern and eastern Manchurian border should focus more on the potential threat from China.

[redacted]

As a complementary measure, the Soviets began at about the same time to flesh out the eight ground force divisions in the vicinity with equipment and apparently manpower; indeed evidence acquired since mid-1967 indicates that the Soviets are in the process of establishing as many as three more ground force divisions along the Manchurian border.

10. In order to enhance the nuclear capability of Soviet combat forces near China, Moscow decided to station Scaleboard missile units in at least three of the four Soviet military districts along the Chinese border. The missiles may be the 450 mile range SS-12, or missiles of longer range. These units are manned by personnel of the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF), but it is not clear whether they will remain under control of

SRF Headquarters in Moscow, be transferred to the local military district commander, or be assigned to some intermediate authority. So far, four Scaleboard complexes have been discovered in 1967, but in view of the complexity of the weapons and support, Moscow probably made the basic decision a year or more in advance of the actual deployment. The fact that the Scaleboard has not yet been identified elsewhere in the Soviet armed forces underscores the increased military priority which the Soviets now accord to the areas near China.

11. Since late 1965 more MVD Border Guards have arrived in Asian frontier areas and a new Border Guard district has been created near the junction of the Soviet-Mongolian-Manchurian borders. The Soviets claim that because incidents continue to occur, it has become necessary to "hermetically seal" the Soviet-Sinkiang and Soviet-Manchurian borders. But Moscow's main concern since late 1965 has been the potential threat posed by regular Chinese military forces, rather than by an occasional foray of Red Guards waving little red books at a border station, or "mooning" by the banks of the Amur. From 1962 to 1964 the regular Soviet military forces along the Chinese

border were essentially auxiliaries to the KGB Border Guards. Now the Border Guard units are essentially forward outposts of the regular military forces. Indeed there have been tentative indications, from a Western journalists' interview with a Soviet official, that since 1966, serious border incidents with the Chinese have been handled on the authority of the local Soviet military district commander rather than through KGB Border Guard Headquarters in Moscow.

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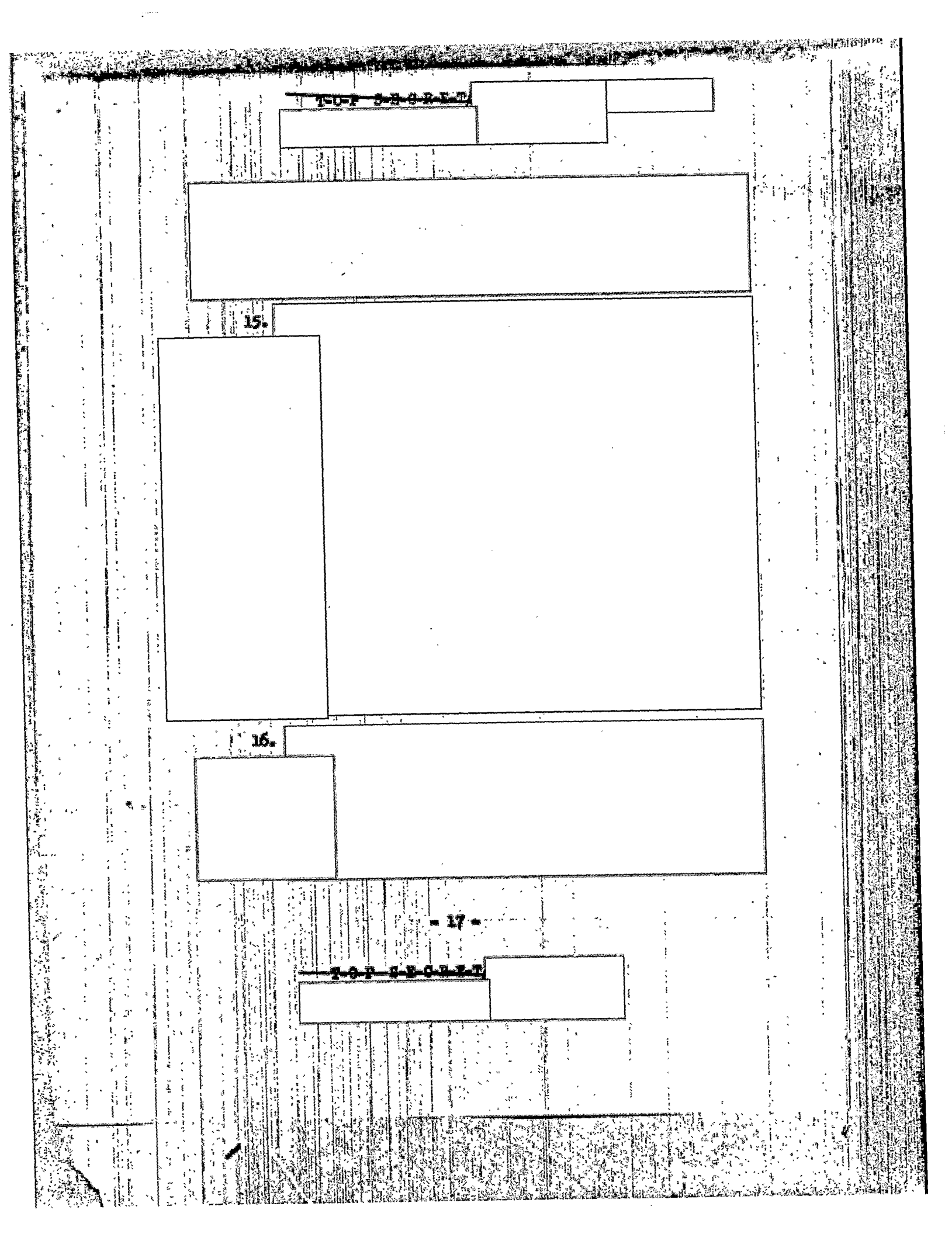
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Long-Term Effects

18. The major improvement of the USSR's military strength near China appears to be continuing at the rate set in late 1965. The Chinese are in all likelihood aware of most of the Soviet efforts; although they have not tried to match the Soviet reinforcement, they are undoubtedly concerned. Their own propaganda notwithstanding, the Chinese probably do not expect a Soviet attack. But they probably suspect with some reason -- that Moscow intends to intimidate them in general and to inhibit them specifically from intervening more actively in South and Southeast Asia.

19. The number of Soviet ground force divisions now deployed near China almost equals the number of Soviet ground force divisions in Eastern Europe (26). As many as 12 divisions have been added to the border area since mid-1964, all but one of these since late 1965. Major elements of at least five of these divisions are known to have been sent from the western USSR. The origin of the other six has not yet been determined (see

Annex). Given the present manpower shortage in Siberia, and the potential for Chinese subversion in Central Asia, it is likely that Moscow has chosen to draw units primarily from European, Slavic areas. Viewed as a whole, the Soviet ground forces near China are in all likelihood presently inferior in manpower and equipment to the Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless the former are known to be receiving some equipment equivalent in quality to those provided Soviet forces in Western USSR.

20.

21. One measure [redacted] was in connection with the reinstitution in 1967 of the post of Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Ground Forces (or at least the filling of a post which had been vacant since 1964). Instead of choosing a commander from one of the more important military districts in the western USSR, or from the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, the Soviets selected the commander of the Far East Military District, the most important district bordering China. Another development, referred to in a Soviet military journal in early 1967, is the apparently recent establishment of the "Far East Theater of Military Operations". This is a term which implicitly covers all regular military and border guard units near China, plus Mongolian armed forces and the Soviet units now in Mongolia. At present the "Far East Theater" is more a concept than an actual military echelon. It illustrates, however, that military planners in Moscow have come to view the strategic requirements of the region as sui generis.

22.

23. In the meantime, Moscow must prepare for a number of military contingencies vis-a-vis China, most of them distasteful,

The Soviets must allow for the possibility, however remote, that Mao and "the stinking cultural revolution group" could order the Chinese armed forces to attack the USSR. Although it is also a remote possibility at this point, the Chinese could opt for a massive intervention in Southeast Asia, with a resultant Sino-US confrontation leading to Soviet involvement. Or, if the Cultural Revolution continues, the political order in China could collapse entirely, posing for Moscow the question of whether or not to intervene in some manner. Of course the Soviet leaders are entitled to express the hope -- as they do -- that Mao will soon leave the scene, thus allowing a new Chinese leadership, rational of mind and socialist of heart, to reverse the course of Sino-Soviet relations. But for the near term, at least, the Soviet General Staff can hardly base its military planning on such hopes.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

ABBOT SMITH
Chairman

ANNEX

Estimated Ground Force Reinforcement of Sino-Soviet Border*

Unit	Time of Movement	From	To
Motorized Rifle Regiment	Late 1963	Western part of Turkestan Military District (MD)	Sinkiang border, Turkestan MD
265th Motorized Rifle Division	Late 1964	Moscow MD	Manchurian border, Far East MD
Army Corps Headquarters	Late 1965	Afghan border, Turkestan MD	Sinkiang border, Turkestan MD
322d Motorized Rifle Division	Mid-1966	North Caucasus MD	Sinkiang border, Turkestan MD
Motorized Rifle Division	Mid-late 1966	Baltic MD	Sinkiang border, Turkestan MD
18th Guards Tank Division	Late 1966-1967	North Caucasus MD	Mongolian border, Transbaykal MD
315th Motorized Rifle Division	Late 1966-1967	Odessa MD	Mongolian border, Transbaykal MD
Motorized Rifle Division	Late 1966-1967	Probably Moscow MD	Mongolian border, Transbaykal MD

* Most of these divisions are probably not, at this time, equivalent in strength or quality to the Soviet divisions now stationed in Eastern Europe.